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# BURNING THE DEAD,

OR

## URN SEPULTURE.

RELIGIOUSLY, SOCIALLY, AND GENERALLY CONSIDERED;  
WITH SUGGESTIONS FOR A REVIVAL OF THE PRACTICE,  
AS A SANITARY MEASURE.

"EARTH TO EARTH, ASHES TO ASHES, DUST TO DUST."

BY A MEMBER OF THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF SURGEONS.

London:

GEORGE PHILIP AND SON, 32, FLEET STREET.  
LIVERPOOL: SOUTH CASTLE STREET.

1857.

20653 Bi. 30  
32. I. 51





## CHAPTER I.

THE HUMAN BODY; ITS CHEMICAL COMPOSITION, OR WHAT IT REALLY IS.

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“Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.”—GEN. iii. 19.

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“EARTH to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.” Earth—ashes—dust, are particles of MATTER, and matter is anything that can be felt, seen, or weighed—that possesses length, breadth, and thickness; it *occupies* a certain space, and thus, *no two portions of matter can occupy the same space at the same time*. The mortal body of man is formed of matter, it is MATERIAL; his immortal soul is IMMATERIAL, spiritual, and therefore *it* can and does, during life, occupy the same space as the body, and at the same time.\* The world on which we dwell, the atmosphere that surrounds us, the sea and the dry land, trees, plants and grass; birds, beasts and fishes, and all *material* things, animate and inanimate, are composed of

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\* “By the soul, we mean a part of man distinct from his body, or a principle in him which is not matter.”—Archbishop Tillotson.

certain ELEMENTS temporarily combined in different proportions. The frame of man himself, who hath dominion over all, is nothing more

Elements, or elementary bodies are those which consist of but one kind of matter; gold, sulphur, and hydrogen gas, are elements; they cannot in our present state of knowledge, be separated into anything else. But water, for instance, is a *compound*—it is composed of two elementary bodies, namely, hydrogen and oxygen gas, and into these it may easily be separated by chemical means.

The number of elementary bodies, according to modern chemists, is 62. Some of these, as chlorine, nitrogen, and the two mentioned above, are gases; others are the metals generally known, and many less frequently heard of, as aluminium, calcium, sodium and potassium; these last three, combining with oxygen, form the well-known articles, lime, soda and potass. Other elements again, are neither gases or metals, as sulphur, carbon, phosphorus, &c.

The air we breathe, is composed of one part of oxygen and four of nitrogen, it also contains a minute quantity of carbon, and has generally more or less of watery vapour, and volatile substances diffused through it. The granite and the porphyry rock, consist of the elements—silicium (a dark lustreless powder that can be resolved into nothing else), aluminium, sulphur, oxygen, hydrogen and

nitrogen. Vegetables contain principally carbon, oxygen, hydrogen and nitrogen, with small traces only of other substances. Animals are but combinations of these same elements in different proportions, varying but slightly from the highest to the lowest. The bones, blood, and flesh of a man, and of an ox, are composed of the same elements, and in almost the same proportions.\*

Mortal man himself has been so carefully analysed by his fellow man, that the composition of each and every tissue and structure of his body can be demonstrated to the fraction of a grain. Thus, in a hundred parts of the fibrin of the flesh, there are—

Of Carbon . . . . .	55·23	parts.
„ Hydrogen . . . . .	7·39	„
„ Nitrogen . . . . .	15·85	„
„ Oxygen . . . . .	20·33	„
„ Sulphur . . . . .	1·20	„
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In a hundred parts of blood, there are 79 of water, 7 of albumen (the same glairy fluid that forms the white of eggs), and 14 of colouring and other matters, all of which have been as minutely analysed as the above.

\* Lord Nelson, after losing his arm, spoke of his body as “the remains of his *carcass*. ”

Bone, the most indestructible part of the body, although it generally rots and moulders in the earth, will, under some circumstances, remain unchanged for many centuries, only to crumble into dust at last; and often, when remains, long buried in the earth, and from which the light and air have been excluded, are exposed, the dry bones, at first distinctly visible, are seen to lose their form and crumble into powder, which the first breath of wind may waft away.

Elementary matter itself is *indestructible*—not a single atom is ever lost. Water may “dry up” and disappear, but it has only evaporated, and still *exists* in the form of vapour, or of gases in the atmosphere. A piece of charcoal (or carbon) is burnt, and vanishes from our sight, but during the process of combustion, it has combined with oxygen and floated away in the form of carbonic acid gas.

The whole body of man is made up of oxygen, hydrogen, nitrogen and carbon, with small quantities of phosphorus, sulphur, calcium, iron, and some other metals, and into these elements—which by again combining, may form not only ashes, earth, and dust, but portions of all other things, animate or inanimate, as well as even other human beings—for in the wondrous laboratory of nature, matter is for ever changing its form and entering into fresh combinations—into these elements, sooner or later man’s body must be resolved

and separated. Can it matter to *him* when he has left it, whether this be effected by the slow and loathsome decomposition which ensues when it is buried in the ground, or cased up more carefully in vaults and catacombs—by being cast into the sea—devoured by beasts of prey—left to wither away and shrivel up in the arid sands of the desert, or by being quickly consumed, dispersed, and dissipated by the action of fire?

But, it may be asked, how then, as is so often told us, shall the *same* bodies that are burned or buried, rise again, when perhaps some of the very particles of which they are composed have formed portions of many other bodies, which are *also* to rise at the same time? In treating of the human body only as *matter* acted on by certain natural laws, I would willingly have avoided any discussion on this subject; but, as we so often hear the resurrection of the dead spoken of in its most earthly, and literal sense, and are even sometimes informed by our ministers, that, at the last day, the very body itself, as it was buried, shall come forth from the grave (in which no single atom of it may then be left), or that the dry bones in the church-yard shall spring together and be covered with flesh and skin—each individual resuming the same form he bore whilst living—the maimed, the crippled, the deformed, and those whose frames are withered and

wasted by old age, or sickness, all appearing, as they appeared on earth—as we so often hear all this, a few remarks seem called for here.

Copland, in his admirable Commentary on Life and Death, observes:—"It is nowhere said in Scripture that the *identical* body which died, shall rise again, but that *man* shall arise—shall again have a material body attached to his soul—a body that shall spring from the remains of his former one, but *changed*, and instead of being formed to decay and perish, shall have an immortal nature." And St. Paul, in his first Epistle to the Corinthians, chap. xv. v. 37, et. seq., says—"And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be." "There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial." "So, also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption." "It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body." "And as we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." "And the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."

This new and incorruptible body, although so different, may still be sufficiently like our earthly one, for the purposes of recognition, while the soul, thus clothed with its garments of immortality, would be the same.

But those, who notwithstanding all this, still per-

sist in maintaining that it is the *identical* body, and nothing else, which is to be restored to us, may, perhaps, argue in this wise.—We know that after death it is decomposed, and that its elements are dispersed in every direction—of this we have ample proof. We know also, that while living, our bodies are constantly undergoing change, that they are continually being renovated and repaired by the addition of fresh matter, while the worn out parts are at the same time got rid of by the breath, perspiration, and other excretory processes; so that if every particle that had *ever* entered into the frame of an old man were collected together, there would be enough to make from twelve to twenty bodies. But, may it not be possible that the atoms which constitute a body, at the very moment death sets his seal upon it, may, by some mysterious power, be preserved from ever entering *again* into the form of mortal man, whatever other purposes they may be applied to; so that, at the appointed hour these same atoms may be ready to return to their former position? Thus only can we imagine the *identical* body being restored to us; and then it must be by special interference with those divine laws, by which, as it appears to us, *all* matter is governed. God only knoweth, to us it seems improbable.\*

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\* It has sometimes been propounded that the soul may carry away with it some attenuated and invisible atom of mat-

There are supposed to be more than a thousand millions of human beings on the face of our earth, and as the average life of man is not much more than thirty years, about thirty-five millions must die every year—nearly four thousand every hour ! while a still larger number are born during the same time.

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ter from the body. If so, and if our heavenly and immortal body is to spring from the *remains* of our earthly one, may it not be made by the Almighty as easily out of a single atom, as Eve was fashioned out of *one* of Adam's ribs ?

## CHAPTER II.

ON MORTAL LIFE, AND THE SEPARATION AND DEPARTURE  
OF THE SOUL FROM THE BODY.

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“ When by a good man’s grave I muse alone,  
 Methinks an angel sits upon the stone,  
 Like those of old, on that thrice hallowed night,  
 Who sate and watched in raiment heavenly bright,  
 And with a voice inspiring joy, not fear,  
 Says, pointing upwards,—*that he is not here,*  
*That he is risen.*”—ROGERS.

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MAN, while dwelling on this earth, is believed to consist of three distinct parts; Body, Life, and Soul. Thus we may consider him as a kind of earthly Trinity—three joined in one.\*

I. THE BODY—The tabernacle of his soul,—that fragile piece of mechanism, so fearfully and wonderfully made, through which he communicates with his fellows, and is brought into contact with the material things by which he is surrounded: its chemical composition, and its relation to matter in general, I have already briefly described.

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\* “ And the Lord God formed man of the *dust* of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of *Life*; and man became a living *Soul*.”—GEN. ii. 7.

II. The mysterious principle of LIFE, possessed by man, in common with other animated creatures. It is life that enables the body to continue the living thing it is, causes the blood to circulate, and purify itself in the lungs at every respiration, gives the stomach power to digest food, and gather from it the nutritious parts ; in short, life keeps in action all the various functions of secretion and excretion, by which the worn and wasted portions are carried off, and new structure formed, so that, it is calculated, every particle of the human frame is changed once in about seven years.

Bichât, the celebrated French physiologist, describes life as “ the assemblage of the functions which resist death.” His countryman, Cuvier, says we should consider it “ as consisting in the faculty possessed by particular corporeal combinations of lasting for a given time,—of attracting, incessantly, into their composition, a portion of the surrounding substances, and, in giving back to the elements portions of their own substance. So long as this series of movements is maintained, the body is a living body ; when it is irrecoverably arrested, it is dead.”

Our own John Hunter wrote, “ the most simple idea of life is, its being the principle of self-preservation, by its preventing matter from falling into dissolution—for dissolution immediately takes place when matter is deprived of it.”

More than two thousand years ago, Aristotle composed his mystical treatise “On the Vital Principle.” Near the commencement of Book the Second, he thus expresses himself: “Of natural bodies, some have *life*, and some have not; by life we mean the faculties of self-nourishment, self-growth, and self-decay.”

And two thousand years hence, if our descendants still occupy this world, will philosophers have more to say upon this subtle subject then?

### III. THE SOUL—the individual *I*, myself.

The very instant that *life* leaves the body, decomposition commences,—“it is no longer a living body, and the Soul cannot continue to inhabit it.” Not all the powers of art and science can arrest the dread progress of “decay’s effacing fingers,” even for a few short hours. Embalming, both ancient and modern, and even the famed Ganal process, are at the best but miserable failures.

In the Museum of the Royal College of Surgeons, in London, may be seen the first wife of one Martin Van Butchell, who, at her husband’s request, was embalmed by Dr. William Hunter and Mr. Carpenter, in the year 1775. No doubt extraordinary pains were taken to preserve both form and feature; and yet, what a wretched mockery of a once lovely woman it now appears, with its shrunken and rotten-looking bust, its hideous, mahogany-coloured face, and its *remarkably fine set of teeth*. Between

the feet are the remains of a green parrot—whether immolated or not at the death of its mistress is uncertain—but as it still retains its plumage, it is a far less repulsive looking object than the larger biped. By the side of Mrs. Van Butchell, is the body of another woman, embalmed by a different process about the same period: she is even more ugly than her neighbour. Then there are Egyptian mummies, rolled and unrolled, and almost tumbling to pieces; mummies from Peru and Teneriffe, and one poor fellow from our antipodes, who has been sun-baked by his friends; it being the custom of some Australian tribes to let their dead dry and wither in the open air. He is tied up in a bundle, and looks about the most horribly grotesque mummy of them all.

Such are some of the results of man's endeavours to interfere with those natural laws by which all matter is governed. As curiosities, these few loathsome relics are no doubt both valuable and interesting, but were there a heap of such dry rubbish, one would feel strongly disposed to make a bonfire of the whole, for it looks fit for nothing else.

Bodies have been encased in coffins of stone and iron, with a view to their preservation; but when, after the lapse of many years, such a receptacle has been opened, it has been found to contain chiefly the dry grubs of worms and other insects, generated by the flesh. In some places such a mode of interment is illegal, and the right to use an iron

coffin has been tried in our courts of law. On one occasion, Lord Stowell, in delivering judgment, spoke as follows :—

“ All contrivances that, whether intentionally or not, prolong the time of dissolution beyond the period at which the common local understanding and usage have fixed it, is an act of injustice, unless compensated in some way or other.”

But to return to our subject.

At the moment of death, the immortal spirit,

“ That spark, unburied in its mortal frame,”

is set free from its tenement of clay. To suppose that it tarries there, even for an instant, is an idea too terrible to contemplate, and cannot be entertained. In the words of St. Paul, we “ abide in the flesh ” no longer; we are “ absent from the body.”

“ Take it, O Death ! and bear away,

Whatever thou canst call thine own,

Thine image stamped upon the clay

Doth give thee *that*, but that alone.”

The Church of England, in its burial service, speaks of “ the spirits of them that depart hence,” “ after they are delivered from the burden of the flesh.” And the Church of Scotland, in treating of the state of man after death, observes, “ The bodies of men after death return to dust, and see corruption ; but their souls, having an immortal subsistence, immediately return to God who gave them .

Every system of religion that ever existed, has

been founded on the belief in some future state, and the belief that the soul is entirely, and completely separated from the body the moment it is *dead*, seems to be implanted naturally in the heart of man. It has existed from the Creation, in every quarter of the globe, and among every variety of its inhabitants. It is the foundation of God's most glorious gift to man, that *Hope* which is never utterly extinguished.

Socrates, the wisest of the old heathen philosophers—and their wisdom was sometimes akin to that of Solomon—said to his friends, while he was dying : “ Bury me where you please, provided you can catch me ; for it seems that I, Socrates, now reasoning with you, cannot convince you that, when I leave this body, *I* shall be no longer present. Let it not be said, then, that Socrates is carried to the grave and buried ; such an expression were an injury done to my immortal part.”

A man who had professed infidelity all his life, was heard to mutter, shortly before he breathed his last,—“ where shall *I* be, this time to-morrow.” And not very long ago, when a hardened murderer was told by his judge, that after hanging, his body would be given to be dissected, he replied, with a true faith in *futurity*,—“ Thank you, my Lord ; it is well you cannot dissect my soul.”

As we cast aside a garment that is worn out, or is so torn and tattered that it will no longer cover us,—as we leave a house that is falling into ruin,

and is no longer fit to shelter us, so do we depart from our mortal bodies; and we regard them with somewhat the same kind of interest and affection. A cloak or coat that we have worn during a long voyage or journey, although it may be but a thing of shreds and patches, is seldom thrown away without a sigh, and the house in which we have dwelt for many years, becomes strangely endeared to us. So too, when those that are beloved have left us, either for a distant part of this world, or for another, do we not cherish, and mourn over the inanimate things that were most intimately connected with their presence among us, as the room, the bed, the chair, that is still called *his* or *her's*? and yet we never speak to *them*, as if the missing one were in his once accustomed place.

The too general practice of speaking of the departed as if they still occupied the tombs in which their bodies are deposited, betrays a strangely mistaken and erroneous idea. We frequently hear friends and relatives alluded to as "resting in the lone churchyard," or as being in their graves, and many a tombstone tells the same false tale. Pope, in his celebrated "Elegy on the Death of an unfortunate Lady," thus falsely says,—

"A heap of dust alone remains of thee ;  
'Tis all thou art, and all the proud shall be "

And Young, in his "Night Thoughts," calls the grave, "that home of man where dwells the multitude." How constantly, too, both in poetry and

prose, do we meet with similar expressions. Different, indeed, is the sublime sentiment conceived in the beautiful lines quoted at the head of this chapter; or in the following epitaph:—

“Though here his mortal body lies,  
His soul lives yet, and never dies,  
It sleeps not in this cold dark bed;  
But, freed by death, hope ye it fled  
To that far distant shore of rest,  
Where spirits trust to be more blest.”

Almost the last words uttered by poor Sir Walter Scott, were,—“I feel as if I were about to be myself again.”

Even if, as some profess to suppose, the Soul sleeps until the Day of Judgment, it sleeps not in that body, which, in an hour, a day, or a year, is often dissipated and dispersed, far and wide, over the face of nature. If, as is more generally believed, we are conscious of our existence immediately after death, whatever may then become of us, surely we are not detained within a mass of inert matter, that is already turning into the worst form of corruption.

And yet, mourners will kneel by the grave-side, and ignorant, or forgetful of what lies mouldering below, will gaze tearfully *downwards*, upon the little mound, or the flat heavy tombstone, and call upon the dead. If they would, indeed, commune with those who have gone before, let them look *upwards*—away from earth—into the clear blue sky, or starry firmament.

## CHAPTER III.

CREMATION, OR BURNING THE BODIES OF THE DEAD, AND PRESERVING THE DRY ASHES IN URNS OR VASES, NOT EXCLUSIVELY A HEATHEN CUSTOM. THE SUBJECT REVIEWED, WITH THE OBJECTIONS LIKELY TO BE RAISED AGAINST A REVIVAL OF THE PRACTICE.

“Bear from hence his body,  
And mourn you for him; let him be regarded  
As the most noble corse that ever herald  
Did follow to his urn.”—CORIOLANUS.

BUT—it will perhaps be said—burning the bodies of the dead, and preserving the ashes, is surely a Heathen, barbarous, and unchristian custom, totally at variance with our present notions of decent burial, and the very idea is repulsive to the feelings.

Answers to these objections may be gleaned from this and the two following chapters.

Cremation was no more a heathen *custom* than common burial in the earth, for both were equally practised by the great Pagan nations of antiquity, while we read of the former being resorted to, in the earliest ages of the world’s history, and long before the names of Greece and Rome were heard of. The body of Saul, the king, and the bodies

of his sons were burned by the valiant men of Israel ; and there are many other allusions to the subject which show that the practice was not uncommon among the people of the Old Testament ; indeed, the “great burnings” mentioned in the book of Chronicles, with which the good and mighty were honoured, are, with reason, believed to have been made for the purpose of consuming the flesh at least, leaving the bones or ashes only to be buried in the royal sepulchres. This custom is not there spoken of as a new thing, and a “great burning,” was evidently considered as one of the highest honours that could be paid to a king, while its omission was at the same time a disgrace.\* It is true that God was wrath with Moab, “because he burned the bones of the king of Edom into lime;”† but this was on account of its being an act of revenge, and done for the express purpose of desecrating and abusing the ashes.

From time immemorial, and in every quarter of the globe, man has disposed of the lifeless remains of his fellow-creature by burning, and very strange sometimes were the rites and ceremonies observed, and the means resorted to.

It is not known what the Assyrians did with

\* See note, in Dr. Kitto’s edition of the Bible, on 2 Chronicles, xvi. 16.

† Amos, ii. 1.

their dead, for no remains of undoubted Assyrian sepulture have hitherto been discovered among the ruins of their mighty cities and stupendous palaces, on which, says Layard, "the patriarch Abraham himself may possibly have looked." Neither do any of the numerous bas-reliefs found there enlighten us upon the subject; but it is very probable that even this most ancient people burned their dead, and either scattered the ashes to the wind, or deposited them in receptacles of some perishable material. May not some of the fragments of pottery found in the débris be pieces of sepulchral urns?

A people called Balcarians used to place the dead man in a large earthen vessel, and carefully excluding the flame, heap piles of burning wood upon it, until incineration was complete. Certain northern tribes burned the body in its grave, and marked the spot with white pebbles arranged on the ground in the form of a human figure. The Chinese were accustomed to place the deceased in the hollow of a living tree, and pile heaps of fuel round it. In the Island of Japan, and in some parts of Asia, even at the present time, the dead are burned on piles of resinous wood and combustible matter.

Sir Thomas Brown, a learned physician who flourished about two hundred years ago, in describing some funeral urns discovered at Walshingham,

in Norfolk, wrote an essay on “*Hydriotophia, or Urne Buriall.*” These urns, the shape of which, he oddly enough compares to that of the maternal envelope which contains us, ere we are born into the world, were from forty to fifty in number, and scarcely a yard below the surface ; some of them contained about two pounds of bony fragments, “skulls, ribs, jawes, teeth, with fresh impression of the combustion, besides the extraneous substances, like pieces of combes, handsomely wrought, small boxes, handles of small brass instruments, brazen nippers, &c.” Antiquarian research alone can give us any idea of how many centuries ago these, or similar relics, were deposited where they have been found, or to what race of our ancestors they once belonged.

But it was amongst those warlike and romantic races, which formerly peopled the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, and of whom the ancient poets tell such wild and wondrous tales, that the most imposing, although perhaps the most barbarous ceremonies, took place. The pyre of newly-felled forest trees, “high in the air a sylvan structure raised,” the body carefully anointed and adorned, and laid, even as the body of king Asa was, “in a bed which was filled with sweet odours and divers kinds of spices prepared by the apothecary’s art;” the funeral games and feasts, the hecatombs, and other sacrifices to the manes,

must have made the obsequies of a great man a thing to be long remembered by those who witnessed them. Then were the calcined bones, or what were supposed to be the real ashes of the dead, carefully collected, washed with wine or milk, and deposited in an urn more or less costly, sometimes of gold or silver, which was placed in the sepulchre or mausoleum, surrounded by lachrymatories, or little vessels containing the tears of those who wept for the departed.

“Where yet the embers glow,  
Wide o'er the pile the sable wine they throw,  
And deep subsides the ashy heap below.  
Next the white bones his sad companions place,  
With tears collected, in the golden vase.  
The sacred relics to the tent they bore ;  
The urn a veil of linen covered o'er.  
That done, they bid the sepulchre aspire,  
And cast the deep foundations round the pyre.”\*

It was a general belief among the ancients that cremation purified the soul, and more effectually separated it from the dregs of earth.

Bulwer, in his “Last Days of Pompeii,” gives a beautiful description of a classic funeral of a much later period, when Rome was in the zenith of her luxury and power. There were hired mourners in those days as in these, and a long procession, headed by musicians playing a slow march, preceded and followed the body.

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\* Pope's Iliad.

" Raised in the form of an altar, of unpolished pine, amidst whose interstices were placed preparations of combustible matter, stood the funeral pyre; and around it drooped the dark and gloomy cypresses so consecrated by song to the tomb." It was customary for the nearest surviving relative to set fire to the pile, and in this instance the sad office devolved on the sister of the deceased, who received a torch for the purpose from one of the attendant priests. " And now, high and far into the dawning skies, broke the fragrant fire; it flashed luminously across the gloomy cypresses—it shot above the massive walls of the neighbouring city; and the early fisherman started to behold the blaze reddening the waves of the creeping sea." " The breeze rapidly aided the effect of the combustibles placed within the pile. By degrees the flame wavered, lowered, dimmed, and slowly, by fits and unequal starts, died away—emblem of life itself. The last sparks were extinguished by the attendants,—the embers were collected. Steeped in the rarest wine, and the costliest odours, the remains were placed in a silver urn, which was solemnly stored in one of the neighbouring sepulchres beside the road; and they placed within it the vial full of tears, and the small coin which poetry still consecrated to the grim boatmen. And the sepulchre was covered with flowers and chaplets, and incense kindled on the altar, and the

tomb hung round with many lamps." And the next morning there was found upon the tomb an emblem of Christianity, in the form of a green palm-branch, which some unknown hand had placed there.

Sometimes the body was enveloped in a wrapper of incombustible cloth, made of asbestos, so that the actual remains might be more effectually preserved.

One great obstacle to the more general adoption of cremation in olden times was doubtless the attendant expense, especially near large towns, where wood was dear; for, although laws were enacted against excessive costliness, and unnecessary waste at funerals, still, a simple interment, where ground for the purpose might be had for little or nothing, must always have been far less costly than the most humble burning; while, unless everything were properly prepared, untoward and painful accidents would be very likely to occur. Nevertheless, urn-sepulture was a much coveted distinction, and considered a mark of great respect and affection.

Sir Thomas Brown quaintly observes, that "Christians abhorred this way of obsequies; and though they stickt not to give their bodies to be burnt in their lives, detested that mode after death." Truly, this is a distinction without much difference, although the thoughts of such martyrdoms may somewhat account for their abhorrence. It was

also very natural for the new converts to detest any established custom of their heathen persecutors, and they might, with more reason than ourselves, have considered cremation to partake of the character of those pagan sacrifices, then so common, and against which a law was enacted about the year 340, when Rome had at last become a Christian city. So it is generally assumed that the custom of burning the dead was abolished by various nations on the introduction of Christianity; but surely the unavoidable expense and trouble before alluded to, which must always have attended the only form of cremation then thought of—namely, on a pile of wood and other combustibles in the open air—may have had as much to do with its abandonment as the existence of any religious scruples.

The old Fathers of the Church say but little on the subject of burning or burying, although they generally enjoin the latter mode. St. Antony strongly condemned the Egyptian custom of *preserving* the body by embalming, and directed that his body might be buried in the earth, and not carried into Egypt, “lest they should store it up in their houses;” but St. Jerome speaks of the remains of saints and holy men being wrapped up in precious linen enclosed in a small urn. It is evident that the practice of urn burial lingered long amongst the Romans of the East and West, for

Theodosius, the Christian emperor, published an edict at Constantinople as late as the end of the fourth century, forbidding burial within cities, or in churches, and this especially referred not only to bodies laid in coffins, but also to *ashes or relics kept above ground in urns.*

Now, although the burning of the dead has sometimes been prohibited in Christian countries on various pretences, I can nowhere find the practice actually condemned by Christian writers on religious grounds, with any show of reason; and surely no person of common sense will venture to assert that the way a man's dead body is disposed of can have any influence on his future state. Are we not taught that at the last, the world itself, and all thereon, will be consumed by fire? How many millions of dead bodies will be burnt then? And on looking back,—independently of the host of martyrs whose bodies perished in the flames,—have not thousands of Christians of all denominations been burnt in one way or the other? Many have expressed a wish to be so dealt with after death. The following is only one of many such individual instances:—Henry Lawrens, a president of the American Congress, had a daughter who was laid out as dead of the small-pox: when the window was opened to ventilate the room, the fresh air revived the supposed corpse, and the young lady finally recovered. Owing to this circumstance the

father conceived such a dread of being buried alive, that he directed by will that his body should be burned, and enjoined on his children the performance of this wish as a sacred duty.

The drowned body of Shelley the poet, when washed on shore, was burned on the coast of Italy, in obedience to the law which required that all things floating to the land should be consumed, to prevent the plague being so brought into the country. His ashes were afterwards conveyed to Rome in a small case, and buried in the Protestant cemetery there; although the officiating clergyman objected for some time to read the service over bones that had been subjected to such *heathenish* treatment.

The advisability—or rather necessity—of burning the dead, is a subject at present engaging very serious attention in France. Owing to the astounding report of the Académie de Médécine, as to the effects which the over-crowded cemeteries of Paris are producing on the health of the inhabitants, the following plan of M. Bonneau has been brought under consideration, it is said with the full approval of the Government.

He proposes to replace all cemeteries adjoining great cities, by an edifice denominated “the Sarco-phagus,” which should occupy the highest spot of ground in the neighbourhood. “Thither the corpses of both rich and poor should be conveyed, and laid

out on a metallic tablet, which, sliding by an instantaneous movement into a concealed furnace, would cause the body to be consumed in the space of a few minutes." He also strongly urges the utility this would be to the public interests of art; "for who would not wish to preserve the ashes of his ancestor. The funeral urn may soon replace on our consoles and mantelpieces the ornaments of bronze clocks and china vases now found there."

"This may seem a mis-placed pleasantry to English minds," says the editor of the Edinburgh Medical Journal; "*but we cannot help being startled at reading the sanitary report leading to it.*" This report will be more fully alluded to presently.\*

It has been suggested to me, that if facilities were afforded for burning a body, it might be an incentive to the crime of murder, as a chief evidence of guilt would be destroyed. This could only apply to those cases where no external sign of violence is apparent, or where no shadow of a suspicion of foul play exists,—and these cases are comparatively rare—so, happily, is murder the rarest of all great crimes. But were cremation adopted, greater attention to the proper registration of the *cause* of death should be imperatively called for;

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\* It may be as well to premise here, that the plan described in the last of these chapters is not the same as that of M. Bonneau.

and this of itself would prove more of a check to crime, than the poor chance of disposing of a murdered body would be an encouragement.

The law is lamentably deficient, or deficiently carried out on this point. When a person dies, a certificate from a legally qualified medical man is nominally required before he can be buried; but some registrars are scandalously careless about this. Certificates are received from quacks, impostors, and ignorant persons, who have not the slightest right to give them, and who can possess no knowledge whatever of disease. A correspondent of the *Lancet* wrote very lately, that such terms as "crick," "death-struck," "infection," "frogs!" and "stoppage," have been gravely entered as the true cause of death. What guarantee have the public that the "crick," or "death-stroke" were not given by the hand of a murderer,—that "infection" or "frogs," were not other names for poison, or that the "stoppage" was not a stoppage of the breath from wilful suffocation? It is not without sufficient reason that Dr. Rumsey tells us so emphatically that, "The certification of the physical circumstances of death by regularly qualified medical men should be *imperatively demanded in all cases.*"\*

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\* Essays on State Medicine.

## CHAPTER IV.

CREMATION AND URN SEPULTURE CONSIDERED AS SANITARY MEASURES.—THE USUAL MODES OF INTERMENT FEARFULLY INJURIOUS TO THE GENERAL HEALTH.

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“After striving to do good to our fellow-creatures during a long life, it seems hard to be told that we stand a chance of poisoning our best friends after we are dead.”

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LET NO DEAD BODY BE BURIED OR BURNED WITHIN THE CITY.

This stood first on that table of the old Roman laws, which treated of funerals and their management, some 450 years before the commencement of the Christian era.

A very few years ago, nearly in the middle of this present nineteenth century, the legislature of enlightened Britain, thought it as well to pass a somewhat similar law—so far at least as regards burial.

Great was the outcry raised, and strenuous the opposition of those whose interests were likely to be affected; for there were some to whom reeking churchyards, and pestiferous burial grounds in

densely populated neighbourhoods, were as mines of gold. Great pains were taken too, to show that the foul and putrid air arising from such places was by no means unhealthy—that it was quite a mistake to suppose so ; and oldfashioned people, of whom many still exist, thought it very cruel that their family vaults or graves should be closed against them, while there was room to squeeze another body in ; then in some places legal difficulties were found to interfere ; so that from various causes, the shutting up of over-crowded churchyards in the midst of human habitations, is a proceeding that is being carried out in a very slow and unsatisfactory manner.

I will now state a few of the many facts adduced during the investigation which led to the measure being enforced at all ; and further, how these facts bear upon the subject under consideration.

It was proved beyond all doubt—as was indeed but too well known to many before, that during the progress of that decomposition which a body undergoes when buried, the elements of which it is composed, *before entering into other and purer states*, form certain putrid gases of so deadly a nature, that their inhalation in a concentrated state, has been known to cause instant death ; while in a more diluted form they are productive of the most serious injury to health. These dreadful effluvia vary much in their virulence according to circumstances, and there

is probably one particular stage of decomposition in which they attain their most fatal power.

The following testimony is chiefly selected from a Parliamentary Report on the Practice of Interment in Towns, made by Mr. Edwin Chadwick, to which the reader is referred, if he desires further information on this unpleasant subject. There are facts concerning dead bodies to be found there, far more revolting than any I have transcribed to these pages.

" So certain as a body has wasted or disappeared, is the fact that a deleterious gas has escaped. If the interments be so deep as to impede escapes at the surface, there is only the greater danger of escape by deep drainage, and the pollution of springs. Dr. Reid detected the escape of deleterious miasma from graves of more than twenty feet deep, and he adds—' Where the drainage of the district in which the churchyard may be placed is of an inferior description, the atmosphere is frequently of the most inferior quality.' ' Defective as our information is as to the precise qualities of the various products from drains, churchyards, and similar places, I think I have seen enough to satisfy me that in all such situations the fluids of the living system imbibe materials which, though they do not always produce great severity of disease, speedily induce a morbid condition, which, *while it renders the body more prone to attacks of fever, is more especially indicated, by the facility with which the*

*fluids pass to a state of putrefaction, and the rapidity with which the slightest wound or cut is apt to pass into a sore."*

"If the bodies be laid in sand or gravel, decomposition will readily take place, the gases will easily permeate the superjacent soil, and escape into the atmosphere. Clayey soils retard decay; they retain the gases, and exclude the external air, but are liable to become deeply cracked and fissured in hot weather, and then allow of escape of the emanations which have been retained, in a highly concentrated state." Some years since, a vault was opened in the churchyard (Stepney), and shortly after, one of the coffins contained therein burst with so loud a report, that hundreds flocked to the place to ascertain the cause. So intense was the poisonous nature of the effluvia arising therefrom, that a great number were attacked with sudden sickness and fainting, many of whom were a considerable time before they recovered their health."

"The bursting of leaden coffins in the vaults of cemeteries, unless they are watched and 'tapped,' to allow the mephitic vapour to escape, appears to be not unfrequent."

"The occurrence of cases of instant death to grave-diggers, from accidentally inhaling the concentrated miasma which escapes from coffins, is undeniable. Slower deaths from exposure to such miasma, are designated as 'low fevers.'"

As a conclusion, it is stated—"That, inasmuch, as there appear to be no cases in which the emanations from human remains in an advanced stage of decomposition are not of a deleterious nature, so there is no case in which the liability to danger should be incurred either by interment (or by entombment in vaults which is the most dangerous), amidst the dwellings of the living, it being established as a general conclusion ;—That all interments in towns, where bodies decompose, contribute to the mass of atmospheric impurity which is injurious to the public health."

"In crowded districts the effects of an invisible fluid are difficult to be observed amidst a complication of other causes, each of a nature ascertained to produce an injurious effect upon the public health, but undistinguished except when it accidentally becomes predominant. Occasionally, however, some medical witnesses who have been accustomed to the smell of the dissecting room, detect the smell of human remains from the graveyards in crowded districts ; and other witnesses have stated, that they can distinguish what is called 'dead man's smell,' when no one else can, and can distinguish it from the miasma of the sewers."

In the case of predominance of the smell from the grave-yard, the immediate consequence ordinarily noted is headache—diarrhoea, dysentery, sore

throat, low fever, or some other disease generally follows.

Mr. Chadwick's Report, as well as other works on this subject, thoroughly confirm all this.

In regard to particular diseases being propagated by the emanations arising from the bodies of those who have died of the same, numerous well authenticated cases are on record. Sir B. Brodie mentions several of small pox being caught in this way—so also have typhus and other fevers been contracted. There are instances of plague having re-appeared on the opening of pits or graves where the plague-stricken have been buried. May not other fatal epidemics have been aroused in the same manner?

Dr. H. W. Rumsey in his "Essays on State Medicine," lately published, tells us that during the late enquiry resulting from the Health of Towns movement—"The destructive effects of mephitic gas from bursting coffins and prematurely opened graves, were stated on credible evidence. Instances were adduced of the communication of diseases from human remains; and solid objections were urged against all endeavours to preserve bodies from their natural return to dust, *i.e. to inorganic matter, fit for re-admission into living combinations.*"

It was supposed that the establishment of large public cemetries would do much to remedy some of the evils above enumerated, and so in a measure

they may have done *for a time*. But what are most of these places becoming, but crowded burial-grounds, every year more and more thickly surrounded by the dwellings of the living? In time their very extent must prove an evil, and from these acres sown with the rotting dead, a fearful harvest may some day be reaped. How shocking too is the practice still pursued in those parts appropriated to "common interments"—where the poor man is buried for a pound. A body is put in and covered with a thin layer of earth, and then another and another is so placed, until—perhaps in the course of four or five days, *during which time the grave is kept open*—some ten or twelve fill it up to a yard or so of the surface: it is then covered up, and another pit is dug close beside it.

Oh! it is pitiful to turn aside from the well-kept turf, studded with splendid monuments and substantial tombstones, and pick our miry way among these humble mounds of bare brown earth, with here and there a mimic tablet of painted wood, a few inches square, inscribed with the name or initials of a departed relative, stuck in the ground, where as a great favour it is allowed to remain until kicked carelessly away. Sometimes, poor flowers, or little shrubs are planted on these dreary graves, but they always die and wither, or are plucked up like weeds, for those who place them there have to labour daily, and can neither afford

the time to tend them, or the money to pay others to do so for them.

"A rich vegetation," says Mr. Chadwick, "exercises a powerful purifying influence, and where the emanations are moderate, as from single graves, would go far to prevent the escape of deleterious miasma."

It is true enough, that trees, and shrubs, and grass, may do some good when properly distributed, but it can be but partial; if trees are too thickly planted, or if they spread much, they must impede the circulation of fresh air, and by their shade render the place damp and gloomy. That beautiful tree the weeping willow, is almost excluded from some cemeteries on this account.

Speaking of an extensive and favourite place of interment in the north of London, Dr. Sutherland, in his official report to Lord Palmerston, bearing the date of November, 1855, affirms, that although "the surface is tolerably well kept, underneath *it is one mass of corruption in the used parts.*" Of this cemetery I can also assert, that close beneath the wall, which bounds this very "mass of corruption," a filthy open sewer of considerable breadth, mis-called a brook, runs sluggishly along, and gathering other impurities in its course, meanders away for miles among more or less thickly populated districts, until no doubt at last it finds its way into that general receptacle of all sorts of abominations, the

river Thames. If cholera, small pox, or typhus are in the neighbourhood, their stronghold is always on the banks of this same poisoned stream. Dr. Sutherland further states, “that the *only* cemetery company which combines in its practice, a proper regard for public health and public decency, is the London Necropolis Company.” This is indeed a sweeping allegation.

The Necropolis, or city of the dead, is a tract of barren land comprising four hundred acres, and situated near Woking. It is reached in about an hour by the South Western Railway; the Company having a separate station. The great distance, and the idea of travelling to the grave by railway, have hitherto proved serious obstacles to its becoming “peopled,” and the whole place at present has a particularly sad and desolate appearance.

The Necropolis Company claim the support of the public because of their moderate charges—because (as yet), they never place more than one body in one grave (except in the case of relatives)—because it is the largest cemetery in the world, situate in a thinly populated district—and because theirs is the only cemetery for the Metropolis in which the dead may rest without injury to the living. All this is at present substantially correct, but the great Necropolis may, after all, be liable to the same fearful objections that appertain to all other extensive burial-grounds. The idea of such

a place, and of what it might become, reminds one of the immense accumulations of human remains discovered in Chaldæa. In some parts they form large hills almost entirely composed of coffins, with their contents long since fallen into dust. These coffins, made of a light yellow clay, and so frail in their construction, that the bodies were probably laid in them after they were placed where found, are of strange but not inelegant forms, and each has a small hole at the foot for the escape of gases. Piled layer upon layer, with scarcely anything between them, the extent of the space they cover is unknown. In speaking of Warka, the largest of these Necropoli, Mr. Loftus says, "It is difficult to convey anything like a correct notion of the piles upon piles of human relics that astound the beholder." On digging down thirty or forty feet, or until the nature of the soil rendered it dangerous to proceed further, they were still found ; and yet it is supposed that *beneath* all this foul rubbish there may still exist the ruins of great cities whose very name can be but a conjecture.\*

These vast cemeteries must once have been sur-

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\* Similar remains, as well as other tombs, abound in the heaps of earth and rubbish under which lies hid "the miserable ruin of Ninevah," in seeming fulfilment of the prophecy—"I will cast abominable filth upon thee, and make thee vile."—*Nahum.* iii. 6.

rounded, or at least near to an immense population, and from them may have arisen the deadly pestilence, that with the sword and famine, swept away mankind from that part of the earth, and left the country “a desert without inhabitants.” “Of all the desolate pictures which I ever beheld, that of Warka incomparably surpasses all. A blade of grass, or an insect finds no existence there.”\*

In the year 1856, 391,369 deaths, and 657,704 births were *registered*; and a late report of the Registrar-General states, “that the natural increase of population in the united kingdom is probably at the rate of *a thousand a day!*” This increase is still increasing; and as more are born every year, so more must die, although the growing preponderance of births over deaths may still continue.

From the discussion which has led to the proposed system of Burning the Dead in France, alluded to in the last Chapter, it appears that the Académie de Médecine have declared that “the vicinity of the cemeteries is a constant source of mortality. No matter from what quarter the wind blows, it must bring over Paris the putrid emanations of Pere-le-Chaise, Montmartre, or Montparnasse, and the very water which we drink, being impregnated with the same poisonous matter, we become the prey of new and frightful diseases of

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\* Loftus' Travels in Chaldæa and Susiana.

the throat and lungs, to which thousands of both sexes fall victims every year. Thus the *angine conneuse* (a dreadful throat disease), which baffles the skill of our most experienced medical men, and which carries off its victims in a few hours, is traced to the absorption of the vitiated air into the windpipe, and has been observed to rage with the greatest violence in those quarters situated nearest to cemeteries."

Such arguments as these have created many converts to the views of M. Bonneau.

Almost the only means of rendering the decomposition of the dead a harmless process to the living, that have hitherto been seriously proposed by scientific men in England, are the application of "safety tubes" to the coffin, so as to carry away the mephitic gas into a chimney flue or chauffeur, and laying the body in a bed of charcoal, or covering it with some antiseptic preparation; but these plans would be too expensive and troublesome for general use.

On reviewing, then, the contents of this chapter, we may confidently assert, that all emanations from places where dead bodies are buried, especially if in large numbers, are of a most dangerous character; and that their fatal effects, in a concentrated form, and the power they possess, when more diluted, of producing various diseases, diminishing the average duration of life, lowering the tone of

the general health, and thereby rendering thousands more liable to be attacked by fever, cholera, or other epidemics, have been fully proved. It is not because they are often imperceptible to the sense of smell that they are harmless. The deadly malaria of the Pontine Marshes is generally as soft and balmy as the air of a Devonshire summer, and the breeze from ague-laden fens may feel as fresh as if it blew from off the sea.

In an *extremely* diluted state, it would be very difficult to *prove* any individual cases of mischief to have arisen from burial-ground effluvia; but it is quite possible that in some conditions of the atmosphere, this poison may be wafted to a distance, and might sometimes furnish an answer to the frequently asked question of—*What* can have brought on this attack of fever, sore throat, or other illness? The human constitution is, at times, owing to certain physiological causes, preternaturally disposed to suffer from particular morbific poisons, and the immense breathing surface of the lungs that is brought into contact with the external air at every respiration, offers the most easy means for these poisons to enter into the frame.

It is impossible to calculate in how small an atom, or in how extremely attenuated a state, a poison may occasionally sow the seeds of a fell disease. A convalescent passes a healthy man in the open air—in a few days the latter is stricken with the

same disease from which the other is recovering. In a village by the side of a river, violent symptoms of colic, indigestion, palsy, &c., abounded: these were attributed to the water having become impregnated from a lead mine four miles distant. It was analysed by an eminent chemist, and found to contain one part of carbonate of lead in 1500,000 of water. A grain or two of musk will scent a room for months, and there will be no perceptible diminution of its weight or size. How inconceivably minute must be the particles floating in the air which cause it to be smelt, and yet some persons are so powerfully affected by the perfume that they are attacked by nausea, fainting, headache, or even by convulsions.

The general health of Great Britain, it is said, is improving every year; but that is no reason it should not improve more rapidly; Doctors do infinitely less mischief, and much more good than they used to do; and although public sanitary measures progress but very slowly, great things are talked of in this way. The introduction of the practice of burning, instead of burying the dead, I firmly believe would be a most important step in the right direction. Who that has read these pages, can for an instant doubt, the incalculable benefit that would result, if, even only during the reign of any of those fatal epidemics which so often visit populous cities, it were enacted that all bodies

should be burnt within a stated time; or if that could not always be *enforced*, that they should be removed to a considerable distance; while in cases of infectious disease, the body should be thoroughly enveloped in cloth prepared to resist for a short time the escape of the dangerous effluvia. This would familiarise the public with the practice. Existing prejudices might be hard to overcome, and that "custom" which enslaves us all, would make a firm stand against such an innovation; but as the world becomes more enlightened, prejudice and custom must at last give way before the march of universal progress.

"The repulsive effect produced on mankind by the mere strangeness of anything which at length we find established among our indispensable conveniences, must be ascribed sometimes to the proud perversity of our nature—sometimes to the crossing of our interests, and to the repugnance to alter what is known for that which has not been sanctioned by our experience."\*

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\* D'Israeli's *Miscellanies of Literature*.

## CHAPTER V.

DESCRIPTION OF A PROPOSED METHOD OF EFFECTUALLY CONSUMING AND DECOMPOSING THE HUMAN BODY BY THE ACTION OF FIRE, WHEREBY, IN AN INCREDIBLY SHORT SPACE OF TIME, AND WITH PROPER DECENCY AND SOLEMNITY, THE WHOLE IS REDUCED TO A SMALL QUANTITY OF LIGHT, DRY ASHES.—CONCLUDING REMARKS.

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"It is indeed a dreadful thing (both in anticipation and reality) the separation between soul and body caused by death; but the moment it takes place, the soul must care very little what becomes of its late body; knowing that the power of God is able to give it an immortal body at the appointed day. What signifies it, whether the dead body be corrupted above or below ground,—be *burned* or otherwise destroyed."—COPLAND's *Mortal Life*.

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IN describing this proposed method of consuming the bodies of the dead, it will be more convenient to speak of the ceremony as if it were actually being performed.

On a gentle eminence, surrounded by pleasant grounds, stands a convenient, well-ventilated chapel, with a high spire or steeple. At the entrance, where some of the mourners might prefer to take

leave of the body, are chambers for their accommodation. Within the edifice are seats for those who follow the remains to the last: there is also an organ, and a gallery for choristers. In the centre of the chapel, embellished with appropriate emblems and devices, is erected a shrine of marble, somewhat like those which cover the ashes of the great and mighty, in our old cathedrals; the openings being filled with prepared plate glass. Within this—a sufficient space intervening—is an inner shrine, covered with bright non-radiating metal, and within this again, is a covered sarcophagus of tempered fire-clay, with one or more longitudinal slits near the top, extending its whole length. As soon as the body is deposited therein, sheets of flame at an immensely high temperature rush through the long apertures from end to end, and acting as a combination of a modified oxy-hydrogen blowpipe, with the reverberatory furnace, utterly and completely consume and decompose the body, *in an incredibly short space of time*; even the large quantity of water it contains is decomposed by the extreme heat, and its elements, instead of retarding, aid combustion, as is the case in fierce conflagrations. The gaseous products of combustion are conveyed away by flues, and means being adopted to consume anything like smoke, all that is observed from the outside, is occasionally a quivering, transparent ether, floating

away from the high steeple to mingle with the atmosphere.

At each end of the sarcophagus is a closely-fitting fireproof door, that farthest from the chapel entrance, communicating with a chamber which projects into the chapel, and adjoins the end of the shrine. Here are the attendants who, unseen, conduct the operation. The door at the other end of the sarcophagus, with a corresponding opening in the inner and outer shrine, is exactly opposite a slab of marble, on which the coffin is deposited when brought into the chapel. The funeral service then commences, according to any form decided on. At an appointed signal, the end of the coffin, which is placed just within the opening in the shrine, is removed, and the body is drawn rapidly, but gently, and without exposure, into the sarcophagus; the sides of the coffin, constructed for the purpose, collapse, and the wooden box is removed to be burned elsewhere.

Meanwhile, the body is committed to the flames to be consumed, and the words "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust," may be appropriately used. The organ peals forth a solemn strain, and a hymn or requiem for the dead is sung. In a few minutes, or even seconds, and without any perceptible noise or commotion, all is over, and nothing but a few pounds or ounces of light ash remains. This is carefully collected by the attendants in the adjoin-

ing chamber; a door, communicating with the chapel, is thrown open, and the relic enclosed in a vase of glass, or other material, is brought in and placed before the mourners, to be finally enshrined in the funeral urn of marble, alabaster, stone or metal.

Then may they follow it to its last resting place, either within a niche or alcove in a gallery built for the purpose, and leading from the chapel; \* or, if preferred, on a pedestal in the adjoining grounds. We see many such a monument in our cemeteries and churchyards; indeed, an urn, sometimes with a rude representation of flames issuing from it, sometimes hung with drapery, or wreathed with flowers; or with a female figure bending over it, is one of our most favourite sepulchral ornaments. It is curious to observe how this remnant of urn burial has been retained among us for so many centuries.†

The early Christians usually marked their sepulchres with the sign of the cross in some form or another, or when they dared not use this symbol, a

\* The Romans called such places *Columbaria*, from their resemblance to dovecotes. This application of the word is not unpleasing.

† The practice of casting three handfuls of earth upon the body is also one of great antiquity, and was truly a *Heathen* custom; for, among the ancient Greeks, all who met a corpse, were expected to do this, to facilitate the passage of the deceased to the Elysian fields.

dove, or palm branch, or a simple word inscribed thereon, told tacitly the faith of the departed. In Catholic countries the cemeteries abound in crosses, and they were very general in English burial places until objected to and displaced by the Puritans. Yet, surely, a Christian's monument can be adorned with no more appropriate an emblem. A vase of ashes, deposited at the foot of a sculptured cross, if properly designed, would form a beautiful and impressive object.

In visiting a place devoted to the reception of these cinerary urns, there would be nothing to detract from the subdued and solemn feeling with which most persons enter an ordinary burial-ground. Instead of walking over festering remains beneath the soddened earth, we should be surrounded only by vases of various patterns, and doubtless of every chaste and elegant design, containing but a few inoffensive ashes. There would be no open graves to avoid, no noxious vapours to make us turn aside, and we should be spared many of those shocking and distressing reflections which *will* force themselves on the minds of those who have any idea of all the slow and dreadful changes a once-loved form must undergo when buried in the earth, before it is utterly decayed.\*

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\* In "Southey's Common Place Book," Fourth Series, p. 193, this feeling is very plainly expressed. He says: "The

Pliny enumerated concern for the dead body among the weaknesses peculiar to man; but it is a natural weakness, and can be no more easily overcome now, than it could eighteen hundred years ago.

From the intimate connexion between the soul and body, existing from the time of birth, from the fact of their actually being *one* during life, and our inability thoroughly to realize the idea of their entire separation until this is really effected by the hand of Death, and from our always, until that moment, having regarded the familiar form itself as the actual man or woman, we cannot help feeling for the forsaken body a deeper and more affectionate interest than it is possible to conceive for any other lifeless thing. Although, alas! it is but as an empty and shattered casket, from which the jewel is removed for ever.

We know, however, that it *must* decompose and fall to atoms, for its elements are required for other purposes; surely, out of consideration for the health of the living, we should desire this decomposition to be effected as speedily as possible, and for other obvious reasons, in a manner as little distressing to the feelings as can be adopted. Which, then, is really the most offensive, the idea of Burning, or of Burial and corruption?

nasty custom of interment makes the idea of a dead friend more unpleasant. We think of the grave, corruption and worms. Burning would be much better."

By the method above detailed, some little harmless relic of what was once so prized, may be retained, that shall last for at least as many generations as an ordinary tomb is cared for. An urn and its contents might be easily preserved, and would occupy but little room, neither is it like a coffin, a hideous object, always regarded with abhorrence. Tablets and cenotaphs might still be erected in memory of the deceased, and as splendid mausoleums might be raised around a vase of sacred ashes, as over a box of rotting flesh and bone ; only instead of the inscription,—“ Here are interred the remains of ——,” man or woman, we should write, “ This urn contains their ashes.”

The French idea of funeral urns, “ replacing on our consoles and mantel-pieces the present ornaments of bronze clocks and china vases,” has been termed a misplaced pleasantry ; but the time may come, when it will not perhaps be considered so very preposterous to enshrine the ashes of a relative among our household gods, for a longer or shorter period. Some might even entertain a fancy for having their ashes mingled in the same receptacle with those of others very near and dear to them : this might be done without any violence to the feelings.

“ Let not their dust be parted,  
For their two hearts in life, were single-hearted.”

If any would rather bury the cinders in the

earth, as Shelley's calcined bones were buried, then let them do so.

In regard to the expense, this would not exceed that of ordinary funerals, if indeed it did not soon very materially diminish it; for an opportunity would be afforded of getting rid of many of those offensive and unnecessary forms now in use. Urns and vases, from the most costly to the most simple, might be manufactured, while standing room for them, in a consecrated gallery, or elsewhere, would cost but little.

I may here briefly allude to the extraordinary dread some persons entertain of being buried alive; an instance of which has been given. In a civilized community this dreadful accident can never occur, except under most peculiar circumstances, and scarcely then, if proper precautions are adopted. Still, such things *have* happened, especially in times when it has been necessary, or compulsory, to hasten the interment; and the idea *will* haunt the mind sometimes.

Now, supposing, for the sake of example, that by some inconceivable mistake, a body were removed from home, to be disposed of in the manner just described, while a spark of life yet lingered in it; the sudden rush of the devouring flame would extinguish it as quickly, and as certainly as a powerful flash of lightning.

Should Cremation and Urn Sepulture ever become a common or a general custom, more extensive machinery and arrangements would of course be required, and a shrine might contain several separate sarcophagi, if that plan were adopted. Still, the bodies of both rich and poor might be treated alike, and as speedily reduced to dust and ashes.

We may, before long, see a Company established in London, for the carrying out of some such measures.

*That the substitution of Burning, for Burying the dead, especially in or near large cities, would be of incalculable benefit to the general health of the community at large, is indisputable: that the former would be neither an unchristian, profane, or barbarous practice, if viewed in a proper light, or cruel and repulsive to the feelings, I have endeavoured to show in these pages.*

Let me conclude with one more quotation from worthy old Sir Thomas Brown : “ 'Tis all one where we lye, or what becomes of our bodies after we are dead, ready to be anything in the extasie of being ever.”

FINIS.











